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## The Changing World as Challenge for the Churches: New Frontiers of Ecumenical Recognition

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Risto Saarinen

## **The Changing World as Challenge for the Churches: New Frontiers of Ecumenical Recognition**

My first visit to Budapest, the venue of our conference, occurred thirty years ago, in the summer of 1984. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) gathered to its assembly in Hungary, and I represented the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as youth delegate. Hungary was a communist country and Ronald Reagan was the President of the United States.

In that assembly, we decided among other matters that apartheid is an issue of *status confessionis* and suspended the white South African churches from their membership in the LWF.<sup>1</sup> Social-ethical issues dominated the assembly agenda, the key words being peace, justice and equality. While I was enthusiastic about many of these issues, I also wondered why individual ethics was not discussed.

The approach to human rights was somewhat selective in this assembly of 1984. Universal rights of equality were highly appreciated, but rights of individual freedom related to the freedom of expression, individual life choices and freedom of conscience, were often considered as conservative and capitalist matters, issues that Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher had pushed on to the political agenda. They were often referred to as the “third basket” of the European Conference of Security and Cooperation. Burning issues like racism were not treated in terms of rights of individual freedom, but as test cases for universal equality.

### From Universalism to Difference

Today we live in a different world. Issues of peace and justice are still prominent and social ethics continues to be important. The relative importance of individual ethics and

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<sup>1</sup> For this, cf. *From Federation to Communion: The History of the LWF*, ed. J. H. Schjørring et al., Minneapolis 1997, esp. 238-239.

freedom rights has, however, increased. Nowadays it dominates the agenda of many churches. In addition to basic equality, societies and religious communities discuss the rights of minorities and the morality of their members' different individual life projects. Human rights are increasingly understood as the structure that enables the flourishing of very different individuals and particular groups.

Political historians and philosophers agree that the end of the Cold War era, around 1990, meant the emergence of a new cultural period which demanded new starting-points for societal reflection. To outline this dramatic cultural change, I will employ some phrases of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor.<sup>2</sup> Until 1990 we can adequately speak of the era of universalism, and politics of universalism, that shaped societal discussion at least since the Second World War. A politics of universalism wants to create a homogenous world in which global equality is strongly affirmed, and individual and cultural differences are largely ignored.

This politics of universalism embraces equality and unity. Legal and institutional structures are meant to enable the equal participation of all interested stakeholders. The United Nations, the Socialist International, the British Commonwealth and the European Economic Community can be understood as typical institutions of such universalism. The ecumenical movement, the World Council of Churches and the global Roman Catholic Church as promoted in the documents of the Second Vatican Council all represent the same trend of homogenous universalism in the field of religion.

After the fall of the iron curtain, however, the premises of such universalism and internationalism changed dramatically. Nationalist ideologies gained new current relevance. Globalisation was no longer seen as a merely positive, progressive trend; the dangers of globalisation began to be emphasized. Instead of global social issues, the rights of minorities and the conscience of the individual moved to the focus of ethical reflection. Rights of human

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", in his *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge 1995, 225-256. See also Simon Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge 2006.

freedom were moved from the agenda of the political right to the center of all democratic politics.

While the leaders of the churches may not have been very conscious of this new paradigm, church documents adopted new political trends. Around the year 2000, three large European religious majorities published influential public documents on globalisation and social ethics. In Germany, this was done in a common text of the Protestant churches and the Catholic Church. In Finland, the Lutheran bishops' conference drafted a similar document. In Russia, the Orthodox Church published a major document on social ethics, the first of its kind in Eastern Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Astonishingly, all three documents are critical of globalisation, recommending policies that return to locally-normative orders and which fight global neoliberalism. Local and regional policies and institutions are preferred over worldwide forces. In a paradoxical manner, all three documents point to the need to create powers which exercise control over global markets and other forces of globalisation. Obviously the churches cannot draft concrete proposals towards such global governance, since they are, *a priori*, critical of universalism and global powers. Rather they recommend a nostalgic return to the roots of their local and regional normative orders, hoping that some anonymous, non-global, force could control global markets and policies.

We may label this new paradigm a "culture of difference", and call its social agenda a support of differences. The new paradigm focuses on the positive appreciation of differences, and those fundamental human rights that enable different people to voice their different concerns and ideologies so that they are not ignored just because they are a minority. Charles Taylor outlines the various tensions between the claim of universal equality and the rights of minorities. He pleads for the preservation of differences and an affirmation of minority rights, even where that would mean the violation of democratic majorities. As a test case, he argues

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<sup>3</sup> For this and the following, see Risto Saarinen, „Die neuesten Soziallehren der Kirchen und ihr europäisches Umfeld“, in *Die europäische Integration und die Kirchen*, ed.. H. Duchhardt, Göttingen 2010, 89-106. The following titles are often used of these documents: *Für eine Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit* (German), *Towards the*

that the French-speaking minority in Quebec, Canada, sometimes needs to have its minority language protected in situations in which the rights of the English-speaking majority are violated. Thus ethnic, linguistic and other cultural identities have, for Taylor, an inherent value; therefore a culture supporting differences is sometimes preferred over a politics of universalism.<sup>4</sup>

The need for such a support of differences has often been approved in recent democratic politics. Theoretical scholars claim that politics in the post-Cold War era can be adequately described as identity politics: that is, as public debates and decision-making concerning the rights and visibility of different identities such as those of sexual, linguistic and ethnic minorities on the one hand, and those of populist, nationalist and fundamentalist groups on the other.

While the earlier, conventional politics of the Cold War era was a struggle for economic distribution between parties and societal classes, the new politics concerns the visibility and flourishing of different identities in the society. Such “identity politics” can be either progressive or regressive, and may lead either towards multiculturalism or to a complete separation between different ethnic identities. Sometimes it can even lead to both simultaneously, as in some Western countries which affirm multiculturalism, but in which the different groups remain segregated from one another in concrete societal practice.<sup>5</sup>

In all these cases the important thing is the particular difference that gives my own group, and myself, its distinctive identity. Identity is not something to be chosen and adopted autonomously; it is primarily something that society needs to recognize: only identities that are recognized through public discussion and political decisions are real identities. They are heteronomous due to this act of recognition. For this reason, identity politics is often characterised, by Hegel’s famous phrase, as “a struggle for recognition”. While the old

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*Common Good* (Finnish), *The Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church* (Russian).

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> See Thompson, op.cit. and Nancy Fraser & Axel Honneth, *Redistribution of Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London 2005.

paradigm of universalism understood equality and toleration as its basic virtues, the cohesive forces of the new era are identities and their recognition.<sup>6</sup>

The overall theme of the present consultation of Societas Oecumenica is *Catholicity under Pressure: The Ambiguous Relationship between Diversity and Unity*. In the following, I build on the historical description outlined above.

During the last 25 years, we have moved from the era of universalism to a new era that emphasizes difference. Diversity is celebrated and ideologies that demand universal validity, or catholicism, remain under pressure. The ecumenical movement is a child of the era of universalism; in order to stay alive, this movement needs to understand that we have moved to a new historical era in which the old paradigm, as such, is no longer valid.

This paradigm change is also a major challenge for the churches in general. The churches need to react to it. As a Lutheran theologian I will give some resources from my Protestant tradition as to how to understand, and react to, this challenge. Basically, however, this is not a confessional issue. It is a theological, philosophical and social issue that concerns all churches and, perhaps, even all religions alike. In addition to recent Protestant theology, I will pay attention to some important Roman Catholic contributions.

Let me summarise the historical paradigms with a description of three symptoms that witness to my claim of paradigm change. The first such symptom is the above-mentioned shift from social ethics to the individualist understanding of human rights, freedom considered as the rights of minorities to promote their own identity. In my own Lutheran tradition, as in many other Protestant and Anglican traditions, recent debates on marriage and homosexuality are prominent examples of this kind. In the Catholic Church, the problem of remarrying after divorce and staying in the church is structurally similar to this issue, as it concerns the legitimate amount of freedom and differing identities within a church.

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<sup>6</sup> Thompson, op.cit. and Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*, Frankfurt 1992.

A second symptom concerns the relationship between Christian and national or local cultural identity. In the era of difference, political leadership is tempted to make religion an ingredient of that national, or even nationalist, identity that promotes a given political programme. Church leaders are tempted to follow this programme, as it promises influence and good standing for their church. In my view this phenomenon concerns not only openly patriotic countries but it is a real, though unspoken, issue in Lutheran countries such as Finland, Sweden and Norway. These countries have a long tradition of national churches. Moreover, the church parties are, in Scandinavia, often linked to political parties. Given this constellation, the churches seek to defend their local normative orders - which may be progressive or regressive - and they remain critical of global trends.

A third symptom concerns the way in which local churches no longer have international or global visions but remain confined to their closest environment, their own village or small town. Head pastors and bishops are elected as local representatives, who primarily care for their own small region. The faithful see the church in a nostalgic fashion, as a remnant of their own childhood, of everyday life, something that is not concerned with global market or international politics. This nostalgia for the “small circles” of the “good life” may even be labeled as the most pervasive symptom, as it feeds the first and second. A nostalgic person may easily vote nationalist leaders and oppose vehemently all new forms of freedom, in family life and elsewhere.

We need to see that the most ardent followers of a politics of difference, or identity politics, are located at the opposite poles of a society: on the one hand, progressive minority activists and advocates of human rights embrace this politics; on the other hand, a similar critique of globalisation also fuels the conservative nostalgia of populist movements.

### Current Philosophical Theories of Recognition

I now move from this generalizing, paradigmatic historical description towards a more careful academic analysis. I will start with two conclusions which many political philosophers have drawn from the multiculturalism discussions of the last twenty years.

When I say that I agree with these two conclusions, I am saying nothing original but am remaining on the common ground of current societal discussion.

First, the choice of a viable paradigm is not a choice between universalism and difference. The most prominent theorists, such as Taylor or the German philosophers Axel Honneth and Rainer Forst, argue that we need both universalism and difference, and that the two notions, taken together can, to some extent, heal each other's weaknesses. Honneth, for instance, considers that human individuals and groups have two basic needs in their societal life. They need respect which is granted to everybody in equal terms by the universal rule of law. They also need individual or collective recognition of their individual features, skills and achievements; this should be granted to each of them separately and according to a proper measure. Thus both individuals and groups need both a politics of universalism, and a support for differences.<sup>7</sup>

Personally I think that ecumenists should adopt a somewhat similar strategy, holding that we need both unity or catholicity, and individual flourishing or striving for perfection. The ecumenical movement discovered costly universalism; but we also need the tools to understand difference. Universality and individual flourishing are not in conflict, rather they may balance one another's weaknesses in ways that, in the field of religion, remain to be unfolded. Because the theory of recognition holds that we need both universalism *and* difference, it may become a friend of the ecumenical movement.

Second, the theorists claim that our era needs a cohesive force which helps to build a harmonious multicultural society. The idea of recognition is often understood as such a force; therefore this idea is currently being studied by many interdisciplinary research groups around the world. Also my own work, and the work of my students in Helsinki, focus on the dynamics of recognition in religion and theology.<sup>8</sup> What is meant by this concept?

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<sup>7</sup> Thompson, op.cit., Honneth, op.cit., Rainer Forst, *Toleranz im Konflikt*, Frankfurt 2003.

<sup>8</sup> See my project website: <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/reasonandreligiousrecognition> . Among new dissertations, Timothy Lim's *Ecclesial Recognition: An Interdisciplinary*



A first glimpse can be obtained by saying that recognition assumes more than mere toleration, but less than agreement or consensus. I may *tolerate* Muslims, secularists and fundamentalist Christians in my own society even when I don't want to have anything to do with them. Political theorists claim that such non-committed toleration is not enough: in order to build a successful multicultural society, its stakeholders should relate positively to one another even when they don't agree. When I *recognize* my Muslim neighbors, however, I commit to work together with them to build a good society. In an ideal case, such recognition should be mutual. However, even a one-sided recognition may be better than nothing. This kind of recognition normally entails a qualification, a "recognizing as" of the other as something: as good a neighbor, as Abraham's heir, as a person of good will, etc.<sup>9</sup>

Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, it has been argued, consists of three parts: love, respect and esteem. Persons learn to *love* in their primary parental relationships; on the basis of loving recognition in a family, we can become socialised. As social creatures, persons should learn universal *respect* within the legal structures of society; in addition, we may gain individual *esteem* on the basis of our particular features or achievements. In all three of its variants, recognition is heteronomous: others recognize me.<sup>10</sup> Toleration is often thought of as being a fairly autonomous virtue, whereas recognition occurs in this heteronomous manner. In some sense, recognition is therefore more social. On the other hand, there may not be any strict need to separate toleration and recognition; Rainer Forst, for instance, seems to consider recognition as a full-fledged, and particularly mature, form of toleration.<sup>11</sup>

Following Hegel, many theorists claim that human beings in a society go through "a struggle for recognition".<sup>12</sup> When we are recognized as children, and later as citizens and as skilled members of the society, we obtain an identity that makes us mature. For this reason,

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*Proposal* (Regent University 2014) deserves mention.

<sup>9</sup> For the as-qualification, see Risto Saarinen, "Anerkennungstheorien und ökumenische Theologie", in *Ökumene – überdacht*, ed. T. Bremer & M. Wernsmann, Freiburg 2014, and Thomas Bedorf, *Verkennende Anerkennung*, Berlin 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, op.cit., Honneth, op.cit.

<sup>11</sup> Forst, op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> Honneth, op.cit., Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, Hamburg 2014.

obtaining recognition resembles reconciliation: due to this event, our struggle is appeased. Repressed groups and discriminated individuals should therefore be recognized; this is the way in which they become balanced members of our society. Although different theorists consider the relative importance of personal psychology differently, they are normally optimistic with regard to the good effects of becoming loved, respected and obtaining esteem. Theoretically, however, one can also imagine a society that lacks these virtues so that its members remain permanently unable of creating lasting ties of co-operation and balanced identity. In such a case, the struggle continues and no reconciliation is provided.

### Recent Theological Work on Recognition

In what follows, I regard these two conclusions as valid and ask whether religion and theology can receive something from them, or even contribute something to this discussion. Most current theories of recognition do not treat religious matters. Contemporary theologians are, however, paying increased attention to them. This process of reception has, as I see it, three stages, each of which opens up valuable insights to the theological understanding of the contemporary world. In the *first stage*, theologians ask what the current discussion can offer to theological reflection; the first stage thus imports the social discussion to theology. In the *second stage*, one begins to ask whether the resources of Christian theology have any phenomenological correspondence to the issues; the second stage thus opens a comparative perspective. In the *third stage*, one asks whether religion and theology have some resources of their own to offer, for instance, a historical resource or a new insight on recognition that stems from the specific field of religion. My own proposals from a Lutheran or Protestant perspective aim to move to this third stage. Before that, however, I will comment on the current theological discussion taking place on the first and second stage.

In his Catholic fundamental theology, Jürgen Werbick considers that Honneth's ideas of love and recognition can be connected to Christian theology, insofar as they are interpreted as pointing towards a divine subject. God thus fulfills the promise established by the philosophical figure of recognition. Similarly, the Lutheran systematic theologian Jan-Olav Henriksen argues that the issue of recognising the other is a prominent aspect of Christology. In another recent study, Gregory Walter claims that the promises given and received in an

anthropological gift exchange, create a framework for recognising the other. For Walter, the theological concept of promise can be understood as a bridge, launching the issue of recognition as a theological theme.<sup>13</sup>

These works belong to a larger current in which contemporary phenomenological philosophy (in particular the thought of Emanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur) is being discussed in theology. While the concepts of difference and otherness are central to this, the idea of recognition is discussed only in a rather sporadic way. I consider this current of discussion to be important for today's ecumenical theology, manifesting as it does today's new awareness of differences. But I also think that the resources of Christian theology remain somewhat poorly represented in many of its studies. The first stage of reception is often primarily interested in launching the ideas of French phenomenology into theology.

However, the new extensive study of Veronika Hoffmann, *Skizzen zur Theologie der Gabe*, brings this process of reception to a new level. This work achieves the first extensive phenomenological comparison between the culture of recognition and Christian theology, thus moving the discussion from the first stage of launching ideas to the second stage of fruitful dialogue. Hoffmann's starting point is the theory of recognition as it appears in Marcel Hénaff's study *The Price of Truth*. Hénaff's book became famous after Paul Ricoeur adopted its conclusions in his last book *The Course of Recognition*. As Hénaff's study proceeds beyond the ideas of Taylor and Honneth, its basic ideas need to be briefly mentioned.<sup>14</sup>

For Hénaff the idea of recognition, and the need to overcome otherness, are not issues that emerge only in late modernity. Rather, they are basic elements of anthropology and shape the social dynamics of all or most cultures. For Hénaff, the anthropological idea of gift exchange

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<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Werbick, *Den Glauben verantworten: Eine Fundamentaltheologie*, Freiburg 2000. Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Desire, Gift, and Recognition: Christology and Postmodern Philosophy*, Grand Rapids 2009. Gregory Walter, *Being Promised: Theology, Gift, and Practice*, Grand Rapids 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Veronika Hoffmann, *Skizzen zu einer Theologie der Gabe*, Freiburg 2013. Marcel Hénaff, *The Price of Truth: Gift, Money, and Philosophy*, Stanford 2010. Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*. Cambridge, Mass. 2005.

comes very close to the general idea of mutual recognition. In giving and receiving ceremonial gifts, we grant and obtain recognition with our neighbors. While economic exchange, i.e. buying and selling, avoids creating lasting social ties, the gift exchange is primarily involved in constructing the social sphere by means of granting and obtaining recognition. In and through material gifts, we give and receive recognition. Recognition is thus the hidden spirit of gift exchange; it is the archetypal non-economic modus of interpersonal communication. Through gift exchange, otherness and distinctive identities become established and shaped; at the same time, such differences are not obstacles to communication but can be effectively overcome. For Paul Ricoeur, Hénaff's ideas mean that the event of obtaining recognition is not only an Hegelian struggle, but also a means of peaceful coexistence.<sup>15</sup>

Hoffmann calls this basic idea of Hénaff “the gift of recognition” and undertakes an extensive phenomenological comparison between it and various traditional themes of dogmatic and ecumenical theology. Here I will give only one example of the many fascinating and well-argued comparisons made in her excellent study. This example concerns the theology of justification, in particular the Lutheran - Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. As a Catholic theologian Hoffmann wants to respond to the Protestant criticisms presented by Eberhard Jüngel. (It is noteworthy that Jüngel, too, considers justification to mean basically an act of divine recognition; Jüngel does not, however, participate in the broader theoretical discussion regarding recognition and difference.<sup>16</sup>)

Hoffmann argues that the Hénaffian “gift of recognition” manages to avoid the “economic” dimensions of salvation, dimensions criticized by the Protestant Reformation. You cannot buy and sell recognition; it can only be granted and obtained as gift. The justification of sinner, understood in terms of recognition, is thus not obtained through merit or achievement; it remains a strictly non-economic gift. At the same time, however, this non-economic mode of justification is not merely unilateral or monergistic: the gift can only be a

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<sup>15</sup> Hénaff, op.cit., Ricoeur, op.cit., esp. 233-241.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffmann, op.cit., 285-346. Eberhard Jüngel, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens*, Tübingen 1998.

gift when both sides are persons, capable of personal acts. Jüngel's typically Protestant problem is that he wants to achieve unilateralism or monergism at any price. When Protestants remain bound to the concepts of merit and achievement, they remain fixed to economic thinking. Instead of non-merit and non-achievement, the Protestant should affirm the possibility of entirely non-economic exchange. This is, according to the Catholic Hoffmann, possible with this idea of the gift of recognition: when Catholics affirm this idea, they are not Pelagians, rather they can affirm the divine initiative without reducing humans to non-personal objects.<sup>17</sup>

Hoffmann argues further that the Pauline act of forensic *logizomai*, imputation or reckoning, is an act of "creative misrecognition". The lasting difference between the righteous God and sinful human beings cannot be overcome by any consideration of universal justice. Instead, in forensic justification a culture of difference and diversity needs to be assumed. Because God justifies sinners through an act of reckoning, God's recognitive act is an act of misrecognition: God takes the sinner to be righteous. At the same time this act is creative in the sense that it enables the circulation, the giving and receiving, of gifts within the gift exchange. In the world of otherness and difference, a successful act of recognition needs to be a *misrecognition* of some kind, Hoffmann argues.<sup>18</sup>

In this limited sense, the traditional Protestant doctrine of forensic justification can be compared phenomenologically to the culture of differences that employs the gift of recognition as its tool of social cohesion. Thus Jüngel is right in claiming that justification is an act of divine recognition; he is wrong, however, in remaining constrained to the economic vocabulary of merit and achievement. In order for recognition to occur, we need to move beyond economic vocabularies. Even then, however, a truly *religious* recognition needs to take place, as a sort of *misrecognition* within the sphere of difference that surpasses universal justice.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hoffmann, op.cit., 285-320.

<sup>18</sup> Hoffmann, op.cit., 320-326.

<sup>19</sup> Hoffmann, op.cit., 295-306.

I cannot here consider Hoffmann's fascinating proposals in detail. I have only taken her as an example of how the discussion about the challenge of difference and diversity can move from the first stage of awareness to the second stage of phenomenological comparison, and thus become fruitful in ecumenical doctrinal dialogue. While scholars like Werbick and Henriksen are to be thanked for creating an initial awareness of recognition, Hoffmann must be thanked for a truly theological discovery of the rich doctrinal resources that can be employed in responding to the challenge of difference and diversity.

### Recognition as a Classical Theme of Theology

I now come to the *third stage*, of claiming that the theology of recognition is not only a new task to be accomplished in our era marked by difference, but a *classical theological issue* which can be located in the great and long tradition of the Christian church. According to this claim the theology of recognition is of equal value with the philosophical theories of Taylor, Honneth, Ricoeur and Hénaff. Fundamentally this theology is already part of our learning and competence; at the same time, it is something that needs to be detected and put into fruitful use. Until now, Protestant theologians have done little, or almost nothing to accomplish this. In Catholic theology, the situation is somewhat better, as the works of Werbick and Hoffmann have shown.

Obviously I cannot justify this fully in the remaining short section of my paper. I will only give some programmatic fragments. First we need to proceed from a phenomenological comparison to the real intellectual history, the *Begriffsgeschichte*, of religious recognition. We have excellent histories of the idea and concept of toleration<sup>20</sup>, but nothing comparable on recognition. If theologians consider the notion of recognition to be a major virtue in this age of difference and multiculturalism, we need to trace the history of this fundamental concept and idea. This is necessary to understand what religious recognition is, and what it can be: once we know what religious recognition is, we can apply it to the challenges facing our religious communities today.

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<sup>20</sup> Forst, op.cit.

The concept of recognition, in German: *Anerkennung*, is not something which Hegel created and which social philosophers discovered after the end of the Cold War. Like other notions in its mental neighbourhood (for instance, tolerance or agreement), it has an extensive intellectual history that goes back to Aristotle and the Greco-Roman world. This history is particularly rich in Protestant theology; this finding may be surprising, as nobody has investigated it. My historical “fragment” is limited to two major figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth. As they employ the concept of recognition in crucial passages of their theology, this small fragment opens up broader perspectives.

In his article *ginosko* (“to know”) in Kittel’s *Dictionary of the New Testament*, Bultmann notes that the biblical notion of “knowing” involves the person who knows. Thus knowing contains an element of *Anerkennen*, of recognizing; it does not remain theoretical but involves will and emotion. This feature stems from Judaism but also permeates New Testament Greek: in the New Testament the knowledge of the divine will is, according to Bultmann, “primarily recognition, an obedient or thankful submission to what is known”. Similarly, the substantive *gnosis* in the Gospels is not theoretical information but “a recognition of God’s new plan of salvation”. The verb *epiginosko*, and the substantive *epignosis*, express this recognition in a paradigmatic manner; *epignosis* has “become an almost technical term for the decisive knowledge of God which is implied in conversion to the Christian faith”.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to human knowledge, the Hebrew and Greek terms are also employed, in a distinctive way, of God’s knowledge: God’s knowing establishes the significance of what is known. The object of God’s knowledge becomes an object of concern and recognition, of *Anerkennung*. In this manner God’s knowledge also means election. In many New Testament passages, God’s knowledge implies election. Thus both human knowledge and divine knowledge mean an attachment, a recognitive involvement and affirmation of the known object. Christian knowledge is “an obedient and grateful recognition of the deeds and demands of God”.

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<sup>21</sup> For this and the following, cf. Rudolf Bultmann, „ginosko“, in *Theologisches*

Bultmann's article on *pisteuo*, "to believe", in Kittel's dictionary deepens the insights regarding cognitive knowledge. Bultmann believes that the Hebrew concept of faith and trust can also be understood as recognition. Such faith involves a strong mutual relationship, a relationship established by God. "The recognition (*Anerkennung*) of Jesus as Lord is intrinsic to Christian faith". In faith, a Christian recognizes Christ as Lord. This faith in the kerygma is "inseparable from faith in the person mediated thereby". In other words faith as recognition has, as its object, both the doctrinal content and the person mediated through this content.<sup>22</sup> The relationship of recognition, as expressed by the terms *gnosis*, *epignosis* and *pistis*, is a mutual relationship of involved persons. The doctrinal content, or the kerygma, belongs to this relationship; at the same time, the interpersonal involvement remains a necessary constituent of religious faith and knowledge.

In his *Church Dogmatics* Karl Barth formulates a similar point when he discusses the cognitive content of faith. He teaches that the human act of faith consists of three aspects, namely, recognizing, knowing and confessing (*Anerkennen, Erkennen, Bekennen*).<sup>23</sup> Against Protestant Orthodoxy Barth teaches that the aspect of recognising must come first. The error of Orthodoxy consists in holding that the Christian first needs to know the object of faith; only then he would perform the acts of recognition and confession. Barth teaches that

*Christian faith is a recognition (Anerkennen) ... Knowing is certainly included in the recognition, but it can only follow it. Recognizing is a taking cognisance which is obedient and compliant, which yields and subordinates itself. This ... is not an incidental and subsequent characteristic of faith, but primary, basic and decisive. It is not preceded by any other kind of knowledge, either knowing or confessing.*<sup>24</sup>

Like Bultmann, Barth holds that the primacy of recognition is due to its capability of creating the reference to the person of Jesus Christ and to the fact represented by Jesus: "Recognition as the basic moment in the act of Christian faith has reference to Jesus Christ

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*Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament 1*, ed. G. Kittel, vol. 1, Stuttgart 1933, 688-719.

<sup>22</sup> Bultmann, Rudolf, „pisteuo“, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 6, ed. G. Kittel, Stuttgart 1959, 174-230.

<sup>23</sup> Barth, Karl, *Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/1*, Zürich 1953, 839.

<sup>24</sup> Barth, op.cit., 847-48 (transl. G. Bromiley). Von wem stammt die englische Übersetzung????



himself ... It has reference to the fact which the community represents in the world, to the person by whom it is constituted and who is its living law.”<sup>25</sup> At this point, Barth explicitly adds that he shares the view of Bultmann.

Here I cannot enter into any larger discussion about the truth-value of the claims of Bultmann and Barth. Let it be added, however, that Barth believes that his view of faith as recognition comes from Luther, and is represented by the Pietism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as the cultural Protestantism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both Bultmann and Barth consider that the idea of biblical knowledge and faith as recognitive involvement is not a small detail, but a prominent and pervasive theme of Protestant theology.

The dialectical contrast between knowledge as theoretical information, and knowledge as personal recognitive involvement, reminds us of the paradigms of universalism and diversity. A paradigm of universalism almost inevitably needs to employ a theoretical concept of rational knowledge. The paradigm of diversity can pay more attention to the idea that each person experiences his or her own knowledge, and the known object, differently. A paradigm of diversity may even grant Barth’s point that the recognitive appreciation comes first, before any theoretical mastery of official teaching. This may sound “postmodern”, but I am not trying to argue for limitless pluralism. Rather, this paradigm of diversity exemplifies a *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding. The basic trust needs to come first, only then we can proceed to the content. The point of Bultmann and Barth is, therefore, not postmodern but classical.

In his small book *Reification*, Axel Honneth discusses the epistemological grounds of the contemporary philosophy of recognition. For Honneth these grounds are found in childhood psychology, especially in the primary relations between child and parent. A small child does not learn loving trust on the basis of information and evidence. Rather love and trust emerge as a primary, objective relationship; only due to the emergence of such a relationship is the child a person who can receive information and perform thinking. Thus knowledge is preceded by constitutive, heteronomous recognition. Honneth claims that the human mind

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<sup>25</sup> Barth, op.cit., 849.

afterwards reverses this order, and performs a problematic act of *Verdinglichung*, of reification. Due to this problematic act, we are accustomed to thinking that we first need to know a given object before we can appreciate and evaluate it. But in human psychology the order differs from this: psychologically we are first constituted by the acts of loving appreciation, and we also form attachments to objects before knowing them.<sup>26</sup>

When Bultmann and Barth teach that recognition comes first in the biblical acts of knowing and believing, these dialectical theologians are surprisingly close to Honneth's theory of recognition. Recognition is a *primary orientation*, one that is grasped in terms of knowledge only afterwards.

### Ecumenical Visions in the Era of Difference

At this point we can proceed to ecumenical matters. The first lesson is that the era of diversity is, finally, nothing fundamentally new. We experience it as new only because we, as ecumenists, have had a strong belief in the victory of universalism. This was, however, in many ways a false belief since it had no secure epistemological grounds: equality and toleration are great virtues of universalism, but they are not everything. They are virtues of *detachment*, powers enabling us to remain distant from objects, to perform reification. In addition to them, we need virtues of *attachment*, powers that bestow upon us a positive identity and equip us with love and respect.

While detachment may be related to catholicity and universalism, we might say that the virtues of attachment emphasise the mark of holiness. The current era of difference has made these virtues visible in new ways. Theologically this is a positive development, since it links us with the biblical understanding of knowing and believing: we know and believe since we are attached to others and recognised by others. We are deeply heteronomous beings.

How are we to evaluate the mark of catholicity on the basis of this insight? We need to rule out two problematic and even false understandings of catholicity. Catholicity is not a

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<sup>26</sup> Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, Oxford 2008.

seemingly objective theoretical information about religion. Catholicity is in danger of *Verdinglichung*, reification: if it becomes an objective information, it loses its biblical background of faith and recognitive knowledge. However, the opposite alternative is also problematic. If I speak of *my* catholicity, or the catholicity of *our supporters*, I have a colonialist attitude to this virtue. The era of difference asks constantly: whose catholicity, which catholicity? We need to ask this question, and deconstruct the ‘ownership’ of the mark of catholicity. Catholicity needs to be seen between its possessive and theoretical extremes: nobody ‘owns’ catholicity, and we cannot have merely theoretical information about it. It is good that catholicity exists in this way, “under pressure”. Only under pressure can catholicity reveal its true nature. Catholicity needs to be complemented with holiness.

Given that our era of difference has the power of recognition as its cohesive force, how could we employ this power in ecumenical work? Ecumenists have employed the idea of recognition prominently, at least since the 1970s. The extensive reflection on ecumenical recognition in the 1970s, initiated by Heinrich Fries and continued by many others, is in many ways similar to the later insights of Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth.<sup>27</sup> Here ecumenists have really moved ahead of their times. At the same time, the new insights of political philosophy and the new era of difference can show how this concept now works more effectively than in the 1970s. With the help of new philosophical insights, much theological work is currently being done to revive the idea of ecumenical recognition. Basically, however, it is the classical theological insights which make this concept helpful and promising.

Ecumenical recognition is not a universalist solution; it aims to solve targeted, and mostly bilateral, problems of church unity. Ecumenical recognition proceeds through formulating convergences and common doctrinal views. At the same time, however, it cannot be ‘doctrinal mathematics’ or a purely Faith and Order style of work: the interpersonal dimension, and the primacy of personal recognition, must be kept in mind. As Bultmann and

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<sup>27</sup> Heinrich Fries, „Was heisst Anerkennung der kirchlichen Ämter?“ *Stimmen der Zeit* 98, 1973, 507-515. This paper is the first one to attempt a theological definition of ecumenical recognition. For an overall history of the older discussion, see Gerard Kelly, *Recognition: Advancing Ecumenical Thinking*, Frankfurt 1996.

Barth point out, personal recognition is theologically primary; the dimension of theoretical knowledge follows and assumes this primary recognition. Doctrinal recognition of some targeted theme may be the end result of this work, but it starts, in some way, with a primary recognition between persons. Some ecumenists, for instance Walter Kasper<sup>28</sup>, saw this marching order already in the 1970s. Perhaps they were then too much ahead of their times; only now, in the era of difference and in the aftermath of the so-called politics of recognition, are we better able to understand what ecumenical recognition means.

The idea of targeted and limited ecumenical recognition can, in some ways, be understood as being a typically Lutheran idea. Martin Luther understood the essence of faith as consisting in faithfulness and in the so-called apprehensive faith, the personal appropriation which makes the believer a committed stakeholder. At the same time, this appropriation is not of one's own doing but is a gift bestowed and initiated by God.<sup>29</sup> This heteronomous constitution of faith and the whole Christian person links Luther with the 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts of Bultmann and the current theorists of recognition.

It needs to be added, however, that until now the idea of recognition has for the most part been elaborated by Catholics. One should also note how the concept of recognition has been employed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In both *Lumen gentium* and *Nostra aetate*, the concept is used as a criterion of evaluating other religions. *Lumen gentium* 9 states that "God gathers his people among those who recognize him in truth". Since Muslims "recognize the Creator", they are related to the people of God. In this manner *Lumen gentium* follows Bultmann's understanding of immediate personal encounter, on the basis of which faith is evaluated. In *Nostra aetate*, the Catholic church calls people to "recognize those spiritual and moral good things" that are found in other religions.<sup>30</sup> Recognition thus also concerns our interpersonal evaluation. Interestingly, Vatican II thus recommends a targeted and limited recognition with regard to other religions. Perhaps we can

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Kasper, „Was bedeutet das: Katholische Anerkennung der Confessio Augustana?“, in H. Meyer et al (eds.), *Katholische Anerkennung des Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses?* Frankfurt 1977.

<sup>29</sup> Risto Saarinen, „Glaube“, in *Luther-Lexikon*, ed. V. Leppin & G. Schneider-Ludorff, Regensburg 2014, 259-261.

<sup>30</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 9, 16; *Nostra aetate* 2.

say that the council fathers have, in this manner, anticipated the era of multiculturalism and difference and given some advice about how to relate to the issues which it raises.